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V. THE WORKHOUSE AS A REFORMATORY

BY FRANK R. McDONALD,
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The primary object of any penal institution, or house of correction of any kind, should be the reformation of the human beings who come under its care. This is especially true of institutions known as workhouses, because what might be called human waste of all kinds finds its way to their doors, and every phase of criminality is represented in them; cripples who are discards in the battle of life, broken-down criminals who are unable to return to a life of usefulness, unfortunate old men without adequate means of support, unable or unwilling to secure remunerative employment, those who have seen better days and have become homeless and have lost all ambition to cope with the affairs of life, become, through one cause or another, dependents upon the workhouses for support.

About twenty per cent of the total population of workhouses is made up of these classes, and the problem of their care is not a difficult one, because if they were the only class with which we had to deal, the care of their surroundings and of each other would be about all that reasonably could be expected from them.

The real problem is in the care of the other eighty per cent made up of two distinct types. Twenty per cent of these are made up of men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years, many of whom have not yet become confirmed criminals, but who are on the borderland of criminality, and who, unless some saving hand, human or divine, reaches them, go from bad to worse and finally swell the population of state prisons or long-term reformatories.

The greatest part of the workhouse population, however, is made up from a class of men who are neither criminals nor criminally inclined. They are for the most part every-day working men who, through their appetite for liquor and the excessive use of intoxicants, become a menace and nuisance to society, or to their families, so that the law finds it necessary to place them in confinement for short terms; they come from every walk of life—laborers, artisans, bookkeepers, clerks, farmers, etc.

Many of the workhouses of the past, and in some instances those of the present day, were conducted on the supposition that the arrest and conviction of a man upon any charge was positive evidence of criminality in him, the dominant idea being to throw him into a place of confinement and treat him as harshly as possible. There seemed to prevail a feeling of vindictiveness towards the so-called criminal, and seldom indeed was any thought bestowed on the moral training of the man, with the result that when a man left an institution managed on lines of brutality, a spirit of revenge was fostered in his mind, and, believing an injustice had been done him, he was in every way nearer being a real criminal than when he entered.

Personal contact with the average man sent to the workhouse has convinced me that while evil may predominate in many, in every one there is an element of good which can be brought to the surface by proper direction in teaching him in a kindly way the necessity of obedience to law. If this is true, it is then the plain duty of every board in charge of workhouses to see that the institution is managed on reformatory lines.

The first principle then of the workhouse management must be the building up of an organization on the basis of doing the most good for the inmates. To this end, discipline of a high order must be maintained among the employees and the inmates. The superintendent or warden should be held absolutely responsible for everything, and, by consent of the board, should be made absolute master in order to secure the best results. He should have full and unquestioned power to hire and discharge all employees, and political appointments should be barred absolutely. It is impossible for any man to manage successfully any penal institution and attain the best results if the positions of his subordinates depend upon their political pull, either with the city, or the board of management, or the superintendent, and unless politics are divorced absolutely from penal institutions it is only a matter of time until failure overtakes the management.

The superintendent should be chosen, not because he is a good politician or because he is an especially good farmer, mechanic, physician or an educator, but for his executive ability in organization, for his fearlessness in choosing or discharging his employees; he should have a heart that can feel for his fellow man, a head that can plan for his betterment, a personality that can command respect and an honest

intention to do what is right and best for those more unfortunate than he.

It is unfortunate for many of our large cities that the idea prevails that workhouse labor is almost useless and so is regarded as a dangerous liability, when in reality it should be a useful asset; for the community that does not furnish useful, productive employment to its workhouse inmates not only does an injustice to its tax-payers, but also is guilty of gross and criminal injustice to the inmates as well.

Starting out upon the theory that the average man cannot be reformed by harsh treatment, that to mistreat him is the surest way to engender hatred and resentment, there should be established between the court that sentences the prisoner to the workhouse and the keeper of that institution, a system of cooperation so that when the man has suffered enough for his offense against society, he may be released on probation and given an oportunity to go out into the world and show his ability to become again a useful member of society. This system is in force in the City of Minneapolis, with the result that many a man has been made a good husband or father and sent out into the world with hopes of a better future, instead of having been kept until his mind became embittered by too long confinement.

One of the great problems of workhouses is the character of employment furnished inmates, and I wish to emphasize the statement that I have no sympathy with the sentiment of makeshift work for prisoners. I believe that every man sent to workhouses for breaking the law should be made, through the product of his toil, to return to the treasury every dollar paid out for his maintenance and care. He should be given hard, useful, productive employment, sufficient not only to maintain him while there, but also to make him realize that he was put into the world for something other than loafing and living on his fellowman.

Having described to you in the beginning the class of men who usually inhabit workhouses, it follows that due consideration must be given to the employment the man is best fitted for, and what class of labor he will be most likely to take up upon his release. In order to accomplish the best results, every workhouse of any size should provide diversified occupation for its inmates. Greenhouses and garden work are suitable for the old and infirm, and the general

work of the house will also keep them employed. Every city has also its hospitals for the poor, where flowers and plants raised by the workhouse greenhouses bring sunshine into the lives of the crippled and paralytic inmates. Farming on as large scale as possible, the planting and cultivating of vegetables, on the most approved and scientific lines, is another employment well suited to the labor of workhouses. I do not mean just makeshift work, but real farming such as a man would be obliged to do if he were earning his living through it.

In locating workhouses, due consideration should be given to the character of the soil; if possible, it should contain some constructive material, such as stone, sand, gravel or clay. When you take into consideration the class of men who come to workhouses you must realize that the closer you stick to the natural products of the earth, the more good you do the man by keeping him close to nature. He should be taught to take his material from the earth and to manufacture it into some useful article. Each day of his labor should show sufficient profit to reimburse the community for the cost of his care. There should be direct cooperation between all the departments of a city or county government, so that the products of the criminal classes in workhouses could be utilized in building up the departments supported by the taxpayer.

I speak of productive employment because I believe when a man knows he is creating something useful he takes an interest in what he is doing; in this class of labor he is not humiliated, but is being educated in a way to make him a useful citizen upon his release.

I think the time is not far distant when every community will see the advisability of a centralization of all municipal dependencies under one broad system, where the pauper, the incurable cripple and paralytic, and the other dependents of the community can be intelligently cared for in separate and suitable quarters. Your so-called criminal population increases in just about the same ratio as your total population, and the same is true of your incurables and dependents. This being true, does it not seem that the law-breaker, who is generally in the best of health, should be made, through the product of his toil to contribute to the support of that other large and more unfortunate class of dependents?

The institution over which I preside is as yet a long way from reaching the ideal state. I do not wish to speak of it save as an object

lesson in what can be accomplished in a workhouse with a daily average of 150 men and 22 women. Within one year, we manufactured 3,000,000 building brick, with a market value in the yards of \$16,500; we built a new cell room and administration building, saving the city \$20,000 in its construction; we built a four-story hospital for tubercular patients, saving the city at least \$18,000; we furnished the city hospital with all its ice, and have given to Hopewell Hospital all its common labor, such as cleaning and laundry, and furnished its bread and vegetables free of charge; while the total cost of operation, including salaries, maintenance of manufacturing plant and prison grounds, did not exceed \$24,000, a clear profit to the city, if we are credited for it all, of over \$30,000.

Inmates of workhouses should be kept constantly employed at least eight hours a day. They should have plain but wholesome food, with surroundings in a clean and orderly condition; they should be allowed at least two hours out of every twenty-four for reading and study, and they should be comfortably dressed, and should be given an occasional vacation from the usual imposed silence, in order to keep them from becoming morose.

I have dwelt at some length on the requirements of workhouses and the physical treatment of the inmate, because I believe reformation must begin by teaching him the value of obedience. I wish to touch upon another side of the subject which seems to me to be of vastly more importance than all the successful business accomplishments of the ablest manager, that is, the saving of the man himself and the conservation of what is best in him, by educating him for better things.

With most men, liquor drinking has become a disease—at least some of our ablest physicians have so stated. If inebriety is a disease, and eighty-five per cent of the population of workhouses reach there through that disease, either directly or indirectly, and if medical science has developed a medicine that will cure the disease, is there any reason why there should not be established in every workhouse in this country a cure for inebriety? Are not most workhouses taking in the drunkard and turning out the drunkard with the same appetite with which he entered? Is it fair to him and to the community that workhouses should go on from day to day, and from year to year, and make no effort to cure this disease in the inmates, that makes mothers and children hide their faces at the name of the

father, that brings misery, degradation and starvation, morally and physically, into so many homes? Then, again, what better place can you find for the cure of ineptitude than a well-conducted workhouse? It is so vastly superior to the average sanitarium for the particular purpose, and furnishes every requirement necessary for a thorough renovation of the system; discipline, steady application to work, plain, coarse food, long enforced rest at night and no dissipating hours. I do not speak of this without experience. In three hundred cases treated in the last three years in the Minneapolis City Workhouse, sixty-five per cent have stood firmly to their determination not to return to liquor drinking. Many have fallen by the wayside, but the percentage is so satisfactory to us that I advocate the adoption of the system in every workhouse in the country.

In conclusion, let me say that the management of a workhouse should be looked at from a purely business standpoint, and it is the duty of the management to do what is best for the inmate and for the community: first, in the conservation of all that is best in the man, by educating him for better things; secondly, in making the burden of caring for the so-called criminal class as light as possible for the taxpayers; thirdly, in an endeavor to establish, not a prison or a place of punishment, but rather an industrial school. Then, as the institution increases in population with the growth of the community, and the wealth produced by the inmates becomes greater than is necessary to care for and maintain them, let an even distribution of the surplus be justly apportioned to them that they may go out into the world prepared, morally, physically and financially, to take their places among their fellowmen as upright citizens.

When this state of development has been reached, armed guards are no longer necessary, and in their places, sympathetic instructors may be installed, and all that will be required to make the workhouses as successful as their original founders intended them to be will be good common sense, good business judgment and square dealing with fellowmen.